Peace and Conflict Studies

Volume 11 | Number 2 Article 2

11-1-2004

University Students from Four Ethnopolitical Conflict Zones: An Exploratory Study of Perceptions of Self and Country

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Abstract

This exploratory comparative case study examines hopes and fears for self and country of 300 students attending university in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. Students report living in stressful societies where ethno political and state violence were the norm. The results of this qualitative study indicate that while the young people are optimistic about their life changes, they are concerned that the conflicts could re-ignite and spiral out of control. In particular, the students' images indicate the importance of the self-society relationship and that these young adults relish the challenge of being productive citizens in their post-conflict societies.

Keywords: *Bosnia-Herzegovina, case study, Northern Ireland, societies, South Africa, Sri Lanka, state violence. stress, young adults*

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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM FOUR ETHNOPOLITICAL CONFLICT ZONES AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND COUNTRY

Sean Byrne and Colleen McLeod

Abstract

This exploratory comparative case study examines hopes and fears for self and country of 300 students attending university in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. Students report living in stressful societies where ethno political and state violence were the norm. The results of this qualitative study indicate that while the young people are optimistic about their life changes, they are concerned that the conflicts could re-ignite and spiral out of control. In particular, the students' images indicate the importance of the self-society relationship and that these young adults relish the challenge of being productive citizens in their post-conflict societies.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War marked turbulent changes within the international milieu (Crocker, Hampson, & Aall, 2001). The international community witnessed an escalated proliferation of ethno political conflicts (Darby, 2001). Further, protracted ethnic conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Rwanda, and Sudan have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives of women and children as well as combatants. Violence against women and children in protracted ethno political conflicts has become the norm (Gurr, 2000). Youth who are exposed to political violence in ethno political conflicts become both victims and perpetrators of the violence (Cairns, 1996). For example, children are used as child soldiers in paramilitary groups as well as state military forces in Liberia, Sudan, and Sri Lanka among others (Wessells, 1998). Rival ethno political groups turn toward children to fight in paramilitary organizations voluntarily or usually as forced conscripts. "Political violence has traumatized the political worldviews of children living in conflict regions... [and] This is important for consideration because today's children are tomorrow's citizens and future leaders" (Byrne, 1997a, p.15).

Hence, young people who grow-up in protracted ethno political conflicts where riots, shootings, and bombings are an everyday occurrence are socialized to perceive violence as normal (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1994; Raviv et al., 1999). Researchers who study political violence and its impact on young people have noted that there is a cycle of violence that becomes perpetual in protracted community conflict contexts (Garbarino et al., 1992; Raviv et al., 1999). Young people begin to accept and expect violence, and to model it after

repeated exposure (Cairns, 1996). A violent environment provides aggressive role models and may influence young people to behave aggressively (Garbarino et al., 1992). Repeated exposure to political violence increases the risk that young adults will engage in future violence and antisocial behavior. During their formative years, young people can learn to accept violence as the norm to solve problems, which becomes difficult to change in adulthood (Byrne, 1997b). If violence is both accepted and expected part of living in a society, it may impact the moral and political development of young people (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coles, 1986). Nevertheless, research demonstrates that most young people have the cognitive capacity to cope with the violence providing the necessary parental and communal support is present (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993). Young people are socialized by the media, parents, peers, schools, churches, and political and military institutions into a sociocultural environment that shapes their individual experiences, and molds their ideas about violence and peace (Byrne, 1997ab, 2000; Punmaki, 1999). Importantly however, these young people can also learn to both cope and develop resiliency skills through the mentoring of parents, family, friends, and community (Brett & McCallin, 1996; Cairns, 1996; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1997). It is the process of building such skills that needs more attention and concern.

Young people grow-up within a specific sociocultural and historic context as they not only develop their political attitudes but also begin to plan their futures (Braunguart & Braunguart, 1996; Erikson, 1968). "Not only does a complex historic period impact young (people's) political images but each new generation helps to shape the historical context" (Byrne, 1997b, p.67). As they continue to prepare themselves for adulthood in a rapidly changing society, "forging the connection between self and society becomes more difficult for young people" (Braunguart & Braunguart, 1996, p.260).

Scant research has focused on young people caught up in the cataclysmic changes in their societies. Therefore, it is important to study the perceptions and experiences of young people in places of conflict, particularly university students, who can be characterized as likely leaders in their country's future. Insights into the political worldviews of young people have implications for policy intended to affect intergroup tolerance and break intergenerational conflict (Byrne, 1997a). The present study sought to provide insight into this arena. Consequently, what do the university students from Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Sri Lanka in this study hope for themselves, and their countries? What impact has the changing societal context had on their perceptions of the nation, and global milieu they are growing-up in? Young adults' experiences in their local communities are important for social change and justice. It is important to examine how young people look at conflict and politics to understand how they may behave as adults. How do young people understand situations of violence of which they are a part? Young adults can identify the probable causes of ethno political conflicts, propose ways to resolve the violence, and build democratic values in post-conflict societies.

Youth, Political Socialization and Conflict

Emotional intelligence is the "ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p.10). Erikson (1950) argued that basic trust grows out of warm, supportive parenting and reasonable expectations for impulse control. Thus, the development of trust in early childhood has lasting consequences for personality development. Moreover, emotional competence develops as children acquire language and communication skills to express their needs, explain their emotional state and achieve their emotional goals (Dunn & Brown, 1991).

Consequently, the early development of children's moral reasoning, political understanding and abstract logical thinking are important to the overall development of children. Children develop as moral thought or moral experiences come in contact with, and meet shock and opposition (Piaget, 1965). Verbal judgment appears whenever the child is called upon to judge other people's actions through adult constraint and moral reasoning (Piaget, 1965). Children assimilate and accommodate new experiences into ones previously learned as they actively construct their own cognitive world. In addition, Kohlberg (1981) believed young people work out moral judgments on their own through a set of internal standards and principles. Kohlberg's development model has been criticized for suggesting that individuals can develop a moral code independent of the relationship context of human interaction (Gilligan 1982). Moral development relies on interpersonal communications, relationships and concerns for others. In other words, human development occurs in a contextual framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The developing child is embedded in several environmental systems, ranging from the immediate family, school, and community to the broader culture embodied in the mass media and cultural customs. There is a continuous reciprocal interaction between young people and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Cultural experiences shape moral behavior and values through modeling and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). A child who carefully observes a model will acquire symbolic representations of the model's behavior that are stored in memory and retrieved later to guide her or his own attempts to imitate. Thus, private speech or language emerges out of social communication as adults assist children in mastering challenging tasks (Vygotsky, 1978). Private speech is eventually internalized as inner verbal thought. The social interaction process allows the child to make important discoveries while in dialogue with an adult (Vygotsky, 1978).

The process of socialization transmits culture to young people to transform them into functioning adults within society. Social institutions such as the family, the media, the schools, and churches in the local community shape young adults behavior as they acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in the community (Erikson, 1968). Robert Coles (1986) makes the point that childhood and young adult learning reproduces the fundamental mode of conflict in a political context. Young people in these social

environments perceive conflict in much different terms as it relates to the political situation. Further, young people, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, have a high level of political common sense with regard to their perceptions of violence as well as their views of political morality (Coles, 1986). Thus, normal adolescent development is a socialization process that consists of developing effective communication skills, and the ability to effectively solve problems using moral reasoning skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

The socialization process influences the images of identity that form the individual from early childhood onwards. Understanding of the other can be encoded in a community's identity and worldview (Senehi, 1996, 2000). Limited contact allows for fictional images of the other to go unchallenged by experience (Byrne, 1997a). The individual's desire to belong to a particular social group is usually motivated by a desire to enhance self-esteem, which necessitates positively evaluating one's own group over other groups (Tajfel, 1981). Social identity, thus, provides an important link between the psychology of the individual and the function of social groups (Tajfel, 1981). Social identity assists in explaining intergroup dynamics.

In addition, young adults struggle with their identity as they transition to adulthood. For example, Erik Erikson (1968) observed that the period between an individual's school life and entry into the work milieu creates an identity crisis for the adolescent. This moratorium between childhood and adulthood centers on one's process of self-discovery where the adolescent searches for the connection between cultural ideas and ideals, with the ultimate risk ending with the formation of a clear identity or the formation of a vague identity. When the adolescent can pursue her or his socio-economic and political choices without constraints, that person is able to develop a strong sense of identity (Erikson, 1968). The adolescent can then integrate society's unstated norms into her or his worldview.

Young people's socialization and emotional development is critical to the formation of identity and a moral sense of self. This is especially critical for young people growing-up in protracted ethno political conflict contexts. The key historical events are now reviewed as these youth came of age in the late 1990s.

The Context for South African, Northern Irish, Sri Lankan, and Bosnian Youth's Development During the Late 1990s

The New World Order of the 1990s witnessed the transformation of conflict previously described as intractable and the situation in South Africa has been no exception. For example, the White South Africans were driven to negotiate with Black, Asian, and Colored South Africans by a wide range of domestic and international pressures (McGarry, 1998). The collapse of the apartheid political system in South Africa ushered in a new nonracial democratic political system, an African National Congress (ANC) led government, and a process to address social justice, accountability, and peace-building known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Byrne, 1999; Taylor, Cock, & Habib, 1999). Track

One political elite negotiations and Track Two people-to-people peacemaking talks allowed the parties to explore common ground, clarify conflict goals, improve communication, and prepare the terrain for Track One negotiations (Lieberfeld, 2002). However, unemployment, poverty, and access to weapons have alienated young people and sparked a crime wave within the urban Bantu in South Africa. As a result of the ongoing and continuous political violence under the apartheid regime, young people lived under "continuous traumatic stress syndrome" (Straker, 1992, p. 11). However, the stress young people were under varied according to their emotional and cognitive maturity and their understanding of the conflict (Dawes, 1990; Muller, 1990).

Similarly in Northern Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA), negotiated between mainstream political parties, both governments, and the representatives of rival loyalist and republican paramilitaries, promised to usher in a period of prosperity (Dixon, 2001; Irvin, 1999). In conjunction, Track Two efforts to empower grassroots constituents from the early 1990s onward created grassroots Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have worked to improve dialogue and reduce threat perceptions between, and among the Unionist and Nationalist communities (Byrne, 2001ab; Byrne & Carter, 1996). However, it remains clear, there is a positive relationship between living in a high-tension area in Belfast and psychological distress (Fields, 1976; Fraser, 1973; Cairns, 1996). Young Northern Irish people do understand the nature and consequences of political violence (Byrne, 1997a). Yet, young people's political understanding is dependent on the sociopolitical milieu that they live in, and the cognitive capacity of the young people themselves (Heskin, 1980; Jahoda & Harrison, 1975; McEvoy, 2000). Recent fragmentation of mainstream paramilitaries into estranged rogue factions coupled with punishment beatings, and the disarmament of the paramilitaries means that a cold peace now exists in Northern Ireland (Byrne, 2000, 2002). Young people continue to be exposed to an overall violent environment (McEvoy, 2000).

During the same point in time, the European Union's (EU) recognition of Slovenia and Croatia's secession in 1991 from Yugoslavia brought a swift reaction from the JNA (Serb dominated Yugoslav army) who invaded both Republics (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, and Cekic, 2001). The seeds of the destruction of the Yugoslav federation resulted from a myriad of issues stretching from a rigid federal constitution, to Serb control of the media for propaganda purposes, to suppression of certain stories over others, to economic differences between the Republics, to the death of Tito (Zagar, 2000). The spillover of the civil war into Bosnia witnessed ethnic cleansing, rape as warfare, the obliteration of "safe havens," and eventual NATO intervention that resulted in the 1995 Dayton peace accord that brought the conflict to an end (Beriker-Atriyas, 1995). However, people in Bosnia especially young people have felt the impact of ethnic violence on their lives, and are in need of psycho-social assistance to reduce trauma (Angel, Hjern and Ingleby, 2001). In Bosnia, some young people coped with the stress reactions of political violence while others displayed a higher anxiety level (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001). Youth, especially ex-combatants, had shrewd insight into the causes of the ethnic turmoil in the former Yugoslavia (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

In contrast to the end of the war and the break-up of Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka has not yet fragmented into two separate entities. Since the mid 1980s the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka has sought a separate state (Tamil Eelam) in the Northern and Eastern provinces (Little, 1994). Both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan army have fought a vicious zero-sum internal war over the past eighteen years without any sign of a peaceful resolution (Keethaponcalon, 2000). The civil war has so far claimed over 60,000 lives, as young men and women have been forced to serve in the Sri Lankan army and in the LTTE (Sahadevan, 1997). Young people in the war zone have never met members of the other ethnic group, so negative stories about the "other" influence the youth to want to violently harm members of other ethnic groups (Keethaponcalon, 2001). These young people believe that they need to take-up arms to avenge the violence perpetrated on their community (Keethaponcalon, 2001). However, there now exists a ripe moment in the conflict situation as the LTTE leadership recently entered into negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. Unfortunately, the conflict has already traumatized thousands of children especially young people who were forced to take-up arms against the other community (Keethaponcalon, 2001).

Given the tumultuous times that young people in each of these four ethno political conflict zones have experienced, the question asked in this study was how do young people in each of these four ethnic conflict regions view themselves and their countries during this era of socio-political turmoil and change? Little research has focused on how youth are connected to society as it experiences violence and political transformation. The purpose of this exploratory study, therefore, was to examine a sample of university students' perceptions of themselves and their countries during an important transition in their countries' history—peace agreements in three of the four regions, and the continuation of political violence in the other, Sri Lanka. Hedley Cantril's (1965) Self Anchoring Striving Scale was used to evaluate the participant's assessment and perception of self and country. The methodology is now discussed.

Methodology

The authors decided to compare and explore university students' attitudes toward self and country in four diverse ethno political conflict zones. Thus, between the summers of 1996 and 1998, 262 students were surveyed by Polkinghorn and Byrne in classroom social gathering locations such as dining halls, and unstructured settings like social halls at eight universities in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and South Africa. In addition, 38 students were surveyed in a colleague's political science class at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka during the fall of 1998. The data set is unique; the sample is convenient, relatively small, and the findings cannot be generalized to all college students or indeed young people in all four ethnic conflict zones. However, the intention of this exploratory comparative case study was to explore and compare university students' attitudes toward self and country in four diverse ethno political conflicts.

The research subjects (N=300) attended largely integrated universities in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Sri Lanka. By country there were 89 participants from Bosnia, 73 from Northern Ireland, 100 from South Africa, and 38 from Sri Lanka. There were 152 males and 147 females in the convenient and clustered sample of the total population of young people in the eight universities. The age range for the group was between 17 and 57 with 93 percent of the sample in the 18-24-age bracket.

The Cantril (1965) Self Anchoring Striving Scale's qualitative and open-ended questions were administered to the university students by the authors. All of the surveys were completed in a classroom setting. The responses were in English except for the Bosnian students. A graduate student at the University of Sarajevo who speaks impeccable English translated all of the surveys and interviews. Finally, the surveys and interviews were transcribed and coded.

The Self Anchoring Striving Scale identifies each subject's overall picture or cognitive boundaries of their life and world expressed in their own terms (Cantril, 1965). The students from all four regions were asked the same four questions: What are your best wishes and hopes for your personal future? (Personal Hope for the Future); What are your worst fears and worries about your personal future? (Personal Fear for the Future); What are your best wishes and hopes for the future of your country? (Country Hope for the Future); and finally; What are your worst fears and worries about the future of your country? (Country Fear for the Future). The responses were then coded into main subjects identified inductively by recurring themes in the responses.

The respondents are different from each other by virtue of ethnicity, religion, class, gender, spatial milieu, and experience of political conflict. Selected quotations from the young people's stories are presented not as scientific claims about their perceptions of self and country. Rather, the opportunity was given to these young adults whose voices have been excluded from previous research and policy-making to have their views on both of these issues to be seriously considered.

Findings

Our respondents' interpretations of self and country are reflected in their responses and stories. Themes and sub themes emerged inductively from the data. A content analysis of the students' paragraphs on hopes and fears for self and country identified their major areas of concern. The participants' responses to the four qualitative questions were then classified into central substantive themes (for example, education, and peace needs) using the coding system of Richard and Margaret Braunguart's (1995) study of university students in South Africa. The most frequently mentioned themes were ranked for the total sample. The students' responses are paraphrased or directly quoted, and are presented to represent their hopes and fears for self and country.

The following discussion centers somewhat selectively on the prevalence and salience of images that the respondents found important and used extensively. In this section we discuss what young adults in the sample found to be salient about their hopes and fears

for self and country. The findings are more about telling the stories these students chose to share with us and about the way they felt given the environment they were living in at the time of the study than they are about generalizing or making broad-based assumptions. The participant's responses to each of the four questions are intended to provide comparative information about how university students in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka perceived themselves and their countries between 1996 and 1998. We now turn to the research findings.

Personal Hope and Personal Fear for the Future

The most common hope for the future was self (47 percent). "Self" was chosen to reflect wishes and hopes for the future that were personal in nature with the person imagining her or his goals, and needs in the best possible light. Examples of self included being "able to achieve one's goals and be respected," to "be happy and have peace in one's life," and to "be healthy and feel fulfilled." The next major theme (22.6 percent) to emerge from the data was national, a term chosen to represent hopes for the future that centered on the nation, community, and more political desires. Responses included "avoiding ethnic violence and helping others," "the end of racial discrimination," to "be able to help with the country's problems," that "there be equal opportunities for everyone," and "peace and a sense of security."

Overall, national problems were the most common fear for the future (36.6 percent). These concerns involved "conflict, civil war and unhappiness," the fear that "discrimination would stop progress," the fear of "facing a future with ethnic conflict," and, that "the killing would not stop." The next major theme was self, where students were, as part of the Self Anchoring Striving Scale, to imagine their future in the worst possible light (32.1 percent). Responses in this category included "contracting a disease," "failure to achieve one's goals," "hurting someone else," and "loss of a loved one."

Table 1

Personal Hope	Frequency	Valid Percent
Self	131	47
National	63	22.6
Personal Fear		
National Problems	98	36.6
Self	86	32.1

1. Personal Hope: Self

A dominant image held by our respondents of personal hope was one of self-development. Our first respondent, Anika, a 19 year-old Asian South African female from Kwazulu Natal, South Africa points out that life is for living. Also, implicit in her interview is the view that career and family life is important for her.

ANIKA: I would like to enjoy the most wonderful gift given to me—life—with someone who, like me, values the importance of family, love, loyalty and success. I hope and wish to be successful in my career and family life.

Roisin is a 20 year-old Catholic student from Belfast, Northern Ireland who also wishes for a stable future for herself and her family. This is what she had to say on the issue:

ROISIN: Personally, I hope to make a life for myself, which is stable and secure, emotionally and financially. I wish for peace, but more than that I wish for accommodation and dialogue.

Matilda, a 23 year-old Tamil female from Colombo, Sri Lanka adds, however, that it is important to understand others and solve all problems in a peaceful way.

MATILDA: I wish to live peacefully without any struggle in my family. I wish to grow spiritually. I want to live with mutual understanding. All problems have to be solved peacefully. I don't like to have enemies.

Further, Sonia, a 24 year-old Muslim woman from Sarajevo, Bosnia is of the opinion that it is important for her to work hard to shape her professional career. She suggests that it will be easier for her to find a professional job if she graduates from college.

SONIA: I want to graduate as soon as possible. I want to find a good job, which will enable me to have a good existence. I want to continue improving in my profession. I want to form my own family.

These assumptions about self exhibit a degree of awareness of the importance of creating a viable and stable future. These respondents are also aware of the significance of finishing their university education as an important precursor to finding professional employment. They highlight the necessity of living in harmony with others, and they illustrate the importance of family and community in the development of self. It would appear that the experience of these young people has been a major determinant in their attitudes toward understanding that they are as individuals and where they want to be in their future societies. They also suggest that individual values are critical in the development of self and society. Their self-desires strongly involved wanting to achieve personal goals. The respondents also cited the desire for a bright future with success; they wanted to enjoy life and have happiness.

There was a strong emphasis on happiness and success, and in achieving personal goals. The respondents also cited the desire for a bright future with success, and to enjoy life and have happiness. Further, the theme of self was represented by the desire to live peacefully, to have freedom, live free of problems and to avoid violence and conflict. Respondents also cited the desire to achieve goals and have success, and to live a "normal

life." These students wanted to have happiness and peace in their lives, but also cited the importance of health and the desire to live a long life.

2. Personal Hope: National

Many of the respondents have steadfast premises about their personal hopes for their countries future. Tom is a 29 year-old White male from the Cape in South Africa. This is what he had to say about his personal hope for the nation:

TOM: I hope to live safely in a country where there is no political violence or violent crime touching me or my family. I wish to help my country through my career. I hope to have children who can grow-up as Africans who have pride and an economic future.

Similarly, Niall a 23 year-old male from Belfast, Northern Ireland wants the political violence to end.

NIALL: I want a just political solution so that I can realize or fulfill some of my expectations and aid others. I wish for health, happiness, and well-being.

The theme of peaceful resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict is also echoed in Keetha's story. He is a 25 year-old Tamil living in the Western Province in Sri Lanka

KEETHA: I want the people to remain peaceful and avoid violent conflict and blood-shed. I wish that we would do social works among the world and the people.

Further, Ruzica, a 23 year-old Croatian Catholic female from Sarajevo in Bosnia wants to live in a peaceful milieu.

RUZICA: I wish for a peaceful country so that I can finish my studies and find a good job. I want to be healthy and have a successful career. The politicians must work together.

The national theme was represented by the desire to promote, assist in developing, and live in peace, and to realize a society characterized by justice without crime. Also cited in this category were the desires to live without racial discrimination and to live in harmony. There were some more political hopes for their national environment, such as the desire for socialism. Peace was also a highly represented desire for the environment of these students. Peace was characterized with wanting to help the nation, have reciprocal relations, and to be a good citizen. Peace meant avoiding violence and living in harmony. The *national* theme was also represented with notions of justice, freedom, security and trust and safety, and the desire for the end of conflict. These respondents also cited the desire for environments that their children could grow up and develop in peace –the desire to have a safe and peaceful place to raise children. While success was also cited, notions of tolerance and the desire to live free of prejudice were important to these respondents.

3. Personal Fear: Self

Here are some examples of responses by our university students who perceive personal fears for their future. Imani is a 24 year-old Black female from Johannesburg, South Africa. This is what she had to say on the topic:

IMANI: I must not be connected to any organization, which can lead me to the violence that is affecting other people's future, and that personal characteristics must not be adopted by other peoples to discriminate against anyone.

Rodger, a 19 year-old Protestant male from Newry, Northern Ireland is cognizant of the fact that the conflict could escalate in Northern Ireland.

RODGER: I am afraid to get involved in the Troubles here. I am afraid to die. I don't want to be jobless. I hate the madness of Northern Ireland. It could become a blood-bath like Lebanon.

Yamana is a 22 year-old Sinhalese female from Colombo, Sri Lanka who is afraid that her parents will prevent her making contacts over the ethno religious divide in Sri Lanka.

YAMANA: I fear having to get married with a Muslim boy. Then I will not get my parents permission for it.

Ishmail, a 20 year-old male from Sarajevo, Bosnia lost his family during the war. He fears that his community will reject him because he has lost all hope and the desire to seek vengeance.

ISHMAIL: That I awake one morning and understand that I'm completely un-useful for this country and that I can in no way help to get better.

While there were various concerns about self-future of the respondents, among the most recurring theme was the fear of death – presumably the fear of violent (as opposed to natural) death. Related to this fear was the concern of failing to achieve goals, or to complete goals. Presumably, this failure would stem from a premature death due to violence or conflict, or a failure to achieve goals and dreams due to other societal dynamics. Fears were also expressed as a lack of success for the future, coupled with a lack of happiness or the loss of a loved one. Lack of success was exemplified by, for example, failure to achieve goals and everything that one is working for is destroyed.

4. Personal Fear: National Problems

The following respondents reveal the perception of personal fear for the future of their countries. These students suggest that a renewed escalation of violence within their countries could impact their personal happiness. Jennifer is a 21 year-old female from the Orange Free State in South Africa who fears that a she will have to move abroad due to a resurgence of violence.

JENNIFER: South Africa will become so violent a place that I will no longer enjoy living here and move abroad. It is something I really fear.

Similarly, Nuala, a 24 year-old female from Derry, Northern Ireland believes that if the Troubles resume that people will live in fear of their lives.

NUALA: That the political situation will become worse and that fear will be the main way by which we live our lives. We won't have a normal life.

However, Raji, a 25 year-old Tamil male from the Western Province in Sri Lanka feels that the conflict will not be resolved in his country.

RAJI: Now-a-days the war is very much all over the world. The ethnic problem here may not be solved.

In addition, Olya, a 20 year-old Muslim female from Sarajevo, Bosnia perceives that the war has made her nervous, and if the fighting were to resume she would become more depressed.

OLYA: The long armed conflict has prostrated my psycho-physical abilities. If we would have a new one, I don't know what I would do.

The second major personal fear reflected national concerns, which included violence and conflict potentially affecting future happiness. The respondents suggested that peace could never be achieved, and that the killing would never stop. Further, they feared being violated and intimidated, and that a breakdown of society would ensure that events were beyond their control. While the way individual respondents articulated their responses varied, the concern of violence and conflict, and a general sense of perhaps lack of control for the future were exemplified in their stories. The young adults' major fears were conflict, war and violence, which were articulated by responses such as worries for dictatorship, and a lack of peace. National problems also appear to affect individual illness and suffering, however these responses seemed largely connected to another major concern--the worry for the outbreak of a new war and a new conflict.

Country Hope and Fear for the Future

When asked to identify what their hope was for their country, 40.4 percent of the students identified positive peace as important to them. Responses included "having a country without conflict," "the presence of a ceasefire and lasting settlement," "the end of conflict and hate," and "lasting peace with justice." The next major theme was political in nature (22.3 percent). Responses included "having a democracy," "freedom, progress, equality and unity;" and finally, "independence."

Over half (54.1 percent) of all respondents named war, divisiveness, and conflict as their main fears for their country's future. The responses for this category included "the fear of chaos, civil war," that "the conflict would not stop," "continued violence and terrorism," "a divided country and poverty," and "death." The next theme to emerge from the data was political problems (12.8 percent), which included "the fear of abuses of power," that "political issues will never be resolved," that "I have no say in the country's political future," and "outside world influences our politics."

Country Hope	Frequency	Valid Percent
Positive Peace	114	40.4
Political	63	22.3
Country Fear		
War/Divisiveness and Conflict	139	54.1
Political Problems	33	12.8

1. Country Hope: Positive Peace

Some of the respondents hope for the future of their country is that the conflict is not intractable and positive peace can be achieved. We have selected some interviews that clearly illustrate this image. Guptha is a 23 year-old Indian female from Durban, South Africa. This is what she said about creating a peaceful society in her homeland.

GUPTHA: That we grow to be more tolerant of each other's differences. That we at least try to understand each other's positions on issues that are important to us. That more people are provided homes and stable incomes. That less children have to make their way on the streets. That crime is alleviated.

In contrast, Seamus, an 18 year-old Catholic from Belfast, Northern Ireland believed that lasting peace could be built in Northern Ireland if a united Ireland could be built outside of the European Union so that Protestants would feel more comfortable living in that political unit.

SEAMUS: We need a united Ireland accepted by all. The re-strengthening of Christianity and the prevention of abortion being introduced must happen as well as wiping out Belfast's drug problems. That Ireland and its people wake-up to the foolish bureaucracy and terrible greed of the European Union and leave it.

Sangrisina is a 21 year-old Tamil female from the North Eastern province of Sri Lanka. Sangrisina perceived that a permanent peace can be forged in Sri Lanka if the roots of structural violence can be addressed.

SANGRISINA: I want us to make a peaceful place for everyone to live in. We can create friendly minded people among all the people of Sri Lanka. We need to improve our educational and economic system so that there are jobs for all the people.

Similarly, Hasneh, a 21 year-old Muslim female from Sarajevo in Bosnia made the point that peace must be built in Bosnia on real rights and social justice.

HASNEH: My country is to be completely free. We need to restore and build on the basis of real rights and justice, and that all people are to be treated equally.

Perhaps not surprisingly, respondents from all four ethno political conflict zones cited hopes for their country's future that included peace. Hopes of peace were accompanied by desires for equality, freedom, tolerance and a country without conflict. In their stories,

respondents also mentioned harmony, co-existence, reconciliation, compromise and cooperation. Issues of economic growth and desires to end the conflict and stop violence were also represented in their stories.

2. Country Hope: Political

The viewpoints of the following respondents on their future hope for their country highlights that a fair and just political solution can be found to the conflict. Youbi is a 21 year-old Black female from the North West Province in South Africa. Youbi argues that South Africans need to build a strong democracy or Black South Africans will be deemed as failures by the outside world.

YOUBI: To have peace. To show other countries that blacks are not failures. I would like to see our economy grow. This thing of our currency, the rand, depreciating makes me sick because this ends up painting Blacks as failures when they are not.

Similarly, Catriona, a 19 year-old Catholic female from Ballymena, Northern Ireland believes that a strong and just democracy must be created for all citizens in Northern Ireland.

CATRIONA: To remove the gun out of politics. To create a true democracy with equal rights and equal allocation of jobs. The removal of second class citizen status.

Moreover, Raji, a 25 year-old Tamil male from the Western Province notes that a viable political solution can be found to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

RAJI: I expect all socio-economic and political problems to be solved in my mother country, especially the ethnic conflict. We need to improve our economic development so that all the people can prosper.

Moamer is a 28 year-old Muslim male from Sarajevo, Bosnia who believes that a just political solution can be found to the conflict in Bosnia.

MOAMER: A free, democratic and united Bosnia needs to be created where the rights of all citizens, nations and minorities are respected. Where war and poverty is ended. Where people are free.

It is reasonable to conclude that these students envision a free society where everyone will have equal political access. They actively advocate that political change is possible. This may suggest that contact with other ethnic groups at their universities is affecting how these young people view the possibility for peaceful change, and how they feel that they can make a positive contribution to a more peaceful society.

3. Country Fear: War, Divisiveness and Conflict

Here are some examples of university students' responses about how they fear that their countries future could be destroyed by war, divisiveness and conflict. Kisme is a 21 year-old Black female from Johannesburg, South Africa. This is what she had to say about war and conflict.

KISME: If the political situation continues that leads to civil war and ends the chance for our country to prosper. Our country is a rich country with mining and agriculture but the outside

countries are controlling our economy and our inflation. Education is being provided in a country that teaches us to repair not to build our own things. In no way are we going to be under the control of any outside countries.

Cathal is a 19 year-old Catholic male from Enniskillen in Northern Ireland. He firmly believes that the protracted conflict in Northern Ireland will continue unabated.

CATHAL: Continued partition, growth of sectarianism, stagnant economy, continued IRA and Loyalist violence, continued oppression and sectarianism, lack of pluralism.

Further, Hansa a 21 year-old Sinhalese female from Colombo, Sri Lanka fears the continuation of violence and rape directed against the Sinhalese women.

HANSA: I fear terrorism, crime violence and the destruction of innocent lives in this country. Most of our ladies are raped by thieves.

Petrov is a 24 year-old male from Sarajevo, Bosnia who fears the outbreak of a new war and an embargo by Serbia and Croatia against the fledgling Bosnian state.

PETROV: I fear hunger, new war, earthquake, continual rule of nationalists who divide our country, and a blockade from Croatia and Serbia.

Respondents in all four countries raised fears for the future of the country around the theme of conflict. In their stories the respondents cited conflict and civil war as their main concerns. The students were concerned that the violence would continue, escalate, and that more people would die. The students also reflected that their country would be divided as war, terrorism, crime and violence escalated out of control. Connected to these perceptions were their images of poverty and hate as key concerns for continued violence and unrest.

4. Country Fear: Political Problems

It is interesting to note that when the political images of students from across the four ethno political conflicts in this study are compared clear similarities emerge. A large number of students identify political problems as a fear for their country's future. Timbeke is a 21 year-old Black male from the Orange Free State in South Africa. He fears that the rigidity of the political parties will create divisiveness in the community.

TIMBEKE: Like I've stated, a battle field will stop the conflicts we had in our country, meaning that these conflicts, which have done by political parties will still continue because of the fact that each party stands firm to their ideologies and their status as a party. My worry is that if not the gun the conflicts will kill people unnoticed.

Similarly, Elizabeth, a 20 year-old Protestant female from Larne in Northern Ireland believes that the political problems will not be solved because the politicians do not want to compromise.

ELIZABETH: The political problems will never be solved; only a political compromise is an option. The politicians need to wise up! I live in hope that one day an agreement can be found to suit all that are involved, so that the majority who can already live in harmony, can do so. We should be able to accept and respect other beliefs. If everyone was able to do this, the political conflict could be tackled.

Onyx, a 24 year-old Tamil from the Central Province in Sri Lanka compares the Sri Lankan conflict with political strife in the Kashmir.

ONYX: According to the present political situation our country may face a political situation like India's Kashmir.

Ismirelda is a 24 year-old Muslim female from Sarajevo. She is afraid of the outbreak of a new war that would divide Bosnia. This is what she had to say:

ISMIRELDA: I am afraid that a new war will erupt in which the people will be hungry. That nationalists will continue to rule the country that will cause it to be divided. If this happens then the country will be blockaded from Croatia and Serbia.

The respondents were afraid that they would lose what has been achieved thus far, or that they would not be able to solve the political problems facing them. They feared that the chance of achieving peace had been lost and that political power was being abused while they were losing their political freedom. In addition, the students worried that there was no political progress in resolving the conflict and that the struggle for peace would fail. Respondents also cited several political concerns, which included having little control over outside world influences.

Discussion

The unpredictability and prolonged nature of political violence is stressful and has a profound impact on the moral and political development of some young people in that violence becomes a "way of life" for them (Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001). Young people who like the danger, prestige, and excitement of political violence model themselves on adults and become more aggressive to cope with the violence, and are politicized into the loyal in-group (Cairns, 1996; Raviv, Oppenheimer, & Bar-Tal, 1999). Others remain unscathed, experience the violence differently, and develop coping skills through the support of family and community (McEvoy, 2000). As the college students from all four ethnic conflict zones in the 1990s scrutinized their respective countries, they remained optimistic and hopeful about themselves and their country's potential future. The age cohort felt that there was hope for their personal development in a peaceful political milieu. However, they also feared that their personal ambitions would be curbed in a society with national problems, especially if that society was in war and turmoil.

Hence, the young people in this study perceive they are initiated and socialized into the civic culture of their respective communities of which they are members. They illustrate political sophistication in their analysis of self and specific problems within their own countries, and about their ability to contribute to solving those problems. This general contrast between collective and self, which comes up in both the relative deprivation literature, and group vs. group interest literature, is an important theme in political psychology.

The effects of war on the social fabric of these lives and through the destruction of social networks, and the witnessing of violent acts, raise the question, can they adapt to a

peaceful society once the war is over? The results of this exploratory comparative study of college students from four different ethnic conflict zones with diverse experiences growing-up, coming from diverse socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic contexts indicate their perceived national tensions and goals were relatively similar. The differences in responses that at times varied by country may, in part, be due to the stage at which each country is in the peace process.

The principal finding of this study is the gap between the students' optimistic perceptions for their own personal future and the pessimistic expectations for the future of their countries. The fact that the students are focusing on self or personal issues while also feeling that the country is falling apart shows that they are trying to maintain a personal identity in an effort to be stable. Making the fundamental shift to adulthood and forging the self-society relationship was found to be critical for these young people preparing to undertake their roles as productive citizens in new democracies and post-conflict societies. Most of the students in this study were optimistic about themselves and hoped to find a niche in society as productive citizens with meaningful lives. Although the students looked to their societies for jobs and careers, they were cautious about their country's future, viewing the legacy of their past with suspicion in impacting their societies' prospects for the future. They were especially concerned about the escalation of conflict and resumption of civil war, the political workings of a new government, and lack of job opportunities.

Coming of age during the tumultuous political turmoil of the 1980s and 1990s, the high personal fear of a return to war and violence may reflect the socialization experience of the various ethnic groups. Conditioned to expect political violence as "normal," these same young students may have to some extent experienced the "transgenerational transmission of trauma" as connected to "time collapse" where past, present, and future commingle within the same time realm (Volkan, 1998). Moreover, the fact that 53.5 percent of the sample seem detached from politics and are slightly cautious about the peaceful transition to a democratic society may indicate that some of these young people may be slightly alienated from the body politic and mainstream society, while others who care, and are worried about their countries are striving for socio-economic and political change. These students appear to have a strong desire to find a place in society as meaningful adults, and to create a world in which they hope to live. Many students in the study wanted to transition to adult life where career, financial security, family, and happiness goals could be readily achieved. There is a decline in how these college students perceive the importance of or their dependence on country or external needs. In other words, their identity is not so dependent on government and politics. These respondents are looking for other hopes besides politics to make their lives better and achieve success. They have a more "constructive story" to tell, and to act out (Senehi, 1996, 2000).

Perhaps this decreased sense of dependence upon politics indicates a shift in how people are seeing themselves and their future. These young people seem to be frustrated with traditional political avenues. Yet, they are anxious about their future and are aware of the need for an overall societal improvement or for the creation of positive peace. Importantly,

any political vacuum could be filled by paramilitaries or other extremist elements in all four societies. Therefore, the question becomes what needs to be done to create a positive outcome for these young people to become fully politically engaged in civil society under conditions that make sense for them.

The students surveyed were from a unique age cohort that had experienced political violence within each of the four ethno political conflict regions in this study. War zones seriously damage the world-views of some young people (Byrne, 1997ab, 2000; Dodge and Raundalen 1987, 1991) while others are resilient and successfully cope with the political violence (Cairns, 1996). These youth are embarking as young adults in the twenty-first century in their respective countries where new political institutions and external economic aid promise socio-economic, and political improvements in the case of Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and South Africa while the civil war in Sri Lanka draws to a stalemate. Consequently, it is worth investigating what impact their experiences of growing-up in the midst of war in the 1990s will have on their future lives in the twenty-first century.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate the need to include young people across the ethno-religious and cultural divide in the process of building a new society. Constructive inclusive mechanisms have to be found to allow young people to participate in the political and economic process, and to develop themselves through education, and by providing career opportunities. The myriad of socio-economic and personal issues identified as important to these young people must be considered and further developed, as these issues go far beyond just political considerations. The college students in this sample were politically astute and critical of their societies. A finding that echoed in other Cantril research contexts of college students who are politically sophisticated and not narcissistic (Braunguart & Braunguart, 1995, 1996; Polkinghorn & Byrne, 2001).

Much will depend on future efforts at peace in each of these four ethno political regions and the actions of the adults to ensure that these young people are connected to their societies and allowed to prosper and contribute to the development of civic society. Adults have responsibility to ensure that the positive aspirations of these young people are realized, so that they may be the visionaries for a new future in their countries.

Acknowledgements: Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the International Society of Political Psychology's 24th Annual Scientific Meeting, July 16-19, 2002, Berlin, Germany and the Research Initiative on the Resolution of Ethnic Conflicts, Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame. We would like to thank Dick Braunguart, Ed Cairns, John Darby, Siobhan McEvoy, Brian Polkinghorn, David Sears, Jessica Senehi, Roberta Sigel, Peter Suedfield, Honggang Yang, and the anonymous reviewers for *Peace and Conflict Studies* for their comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

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[1] The coding procedures and subsequent findings were submitted to the Montgomery and Crittenden (1977) test. The responses were independently coded by the researchers, who then verified these independent findings against one another.